

The Boxelder Bug

Description

The Boxelder Bug is a common pest of boxelder trees, which are also known as ash-leaved maple. Adult bugs are oval in shape and about ½ inch long when full grown. They are dull black and marked with red along the edges of the front wings. The immature bugs, called nymphs, are also red and black. The legs and short wing pads of the nymphs are black. The exposed abdomen is red. As the nymphs mature, the black wings grow longer and finally cover the red abdomen in the adult stage.



Adult Boxelder Bug



Nymph Boxelder Bug

Life Cycle

Eggs hatch into nymphs in late spring and early summer. They feed during the summer primarily on leaves, twigs, and seeds of boxelder trees. Boxelder trees have separate male and female trees. Female trees bear winged seeds (pods) and male trees do not. The largest bug populations tend to build up on female trees. These



Boxelder Tree Leaves and Seed Pods

trees are not damaged by the feeding activity of the bugs. In the fall (usually October in central Maryland), the red nymphs and the black adults collect in masses on the trunks of boxelder trees near the ground. Adults later fly away to hibernate in buildings, rock piles, fallen leaves or other sheltered places. At this time the bugs become a nuisance to homeowners. Swarms of bugs will be found on sunny exposures on porches, windows or door frames and on siding. They prefer white surfaces on the south side of buildings. They hide in cracks during cold weather, but become active on warm days during the winter. Bugs can find their way through cracks where they become a nuisance indoors. The Boxelder bug is not harmful to humans or pets. It will not bite or reproduce indoors. There are reports that squashed bugs will stain fabrics.



Boxelder Tree



Boxelder bugs clustered on leaf

Cultural Control

Boxelder bugs breed on the female or pod-bearing boxelder trees. Removal of these trees near the home is suggested. The male boxelder trees may be grown without a significant bug problem.

Eliminate hiding places such as piles of lumber, rocks and trash close to the house to make the problem of control easier. Tighten windows, doors and ventilators to prevent entry. If bugs enter the house in the fall they may be easily picked up with a vacuum cleaner.

Boxelder bugs on houses can be knocked down with a forceful spray of soapy water. Mix 2 teaspoons of a mild soap, not a detergent, in one gallon of water. Some soaps and most detergents can cause damage to plants. If there are plants close to the house, it is advisable to use an insecticidal soap. If in doubt, use the insecticidal soap and check the label for any sensitive plants. The bugs must be sprayed so that they are thoroughly wet. Adjust the sprayer nozzle to give a solid stream that will carry farther than cone-shaped spray. Do not spray conventional insecticides on homes because they may discolor or damage some finishes. Test the insecticidal soap on a inconspicuous part of the house to make sure it won't damage the finish.

Chemical Control

The bugs can also be killed with insecticides. The most efficient control can be obtained in October when the population is concentrated on the trunks of boxelder trees near the ground. The foliage of infested female boxelder trees can also be sprayed in early summer while the bugs are immature. At this time most boxelder bugs have short wings and the bugs cannot fly.

Use one of the following insecticides according to the directions on the label:
Insecticidal soap, Insecticidal soap combined or formulated with pyrethrin, or pyrethrin alone should give satisfactory control.

**USE PESTICIDES WITH CARE.
READ LABEL DIRECTIONS. FOLLOW ALL SAFETY PRECAUTIONS.**

**Do you have a plant or insect pest question?
Visit us at extension.umd.edu/hgic
and click Ask Maryland's Garden Experts**

Author: Michael J. Raupp, UM Extension Entomologist, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742; Revised by Mary Kay Malinoski, University of Maryland Extension Specialist, Home and Garden Information Center

This publication is a series of publications of the University of Maryland Extension and The Home and Garden Information Center. For more information on related publications and programs, <http://extension.umd.edu/hgic>. Please visit <http://extension.umd.edu/> to find out more about Extension programs in Maryland.

The University of Maryland, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources programs are open to all and will not discriminate against anyone because of race, age, sex, color, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry, or national origin, marital status, genetic information, or political affiliation, or gender identity and expression.